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Totsu-totsu Dance Session at Our Tampines Hub Combines Dementia Care and Creative Arts

Organised by Dementia Singapore and Japanese arts group torindo, the workshop paired persons with dementia here with Japanese choreographer Osamu Jareo for an interactive dance session



Osamu Jareo (in dark grey shirt and khaki pants on the right) leading the participants in a movement exercise accompanied by percussionist Yaziz Hassan (left) at Our Tampines Hub Dance Studio 6.

[Singapore, September 9, 2023] A group of persons with dementia and their caregivers had the opportunity to become dancers for a day during a dance workshop organised by Dementia Singapore as part of World Alzheimer's Month.

During the session, Japanese dancer and choreographer Osamu Jareo guided four persons with dementia and their respective caregivers through a series of free-flowing improvised dance movements set to live music performed by award-winning Singaporean percussionist Yaziz Hassan.

The session, which was held in Dance Studio 6 at Our Tampines Hub and observed by Guest of Honour Desmond Choo, Mayor of North East District, was a project collaboration between Dementia Singapore and Japanese non-profit arts organisation torindo that sought to combine dementia care with creative arts. The project is also supported by the Japanese Government's Agency for Cultural Affairs.

"Totsu-totsu Dance" is a dance workshop and dance performance that Jareo and torindo have been engaged in with elderly people with dementia and caregivers since 2009.

The word "Totsu-totsu" is from the Japanese words meaning "faltering" and "unsophisticated", evoking the image of "slowly, wavering and hesitating".

Jareo, who also lectures at the College of Contemporary Psychology, Rikkyo University, said that Totsu-totsu is aimed at creating new ways for persons with dementia to interact with the people around them.

"My goal is to free them from the structures and restrictions around them, or frameworks they put themselves into when it comes to interacting with their caregivers or other people around them," he said.

"I get them to focus on the connections they make with others. If a person changes his way of interacting with others, the world changes as well. It's like a ripple effect. And this is what I aim for."

Dr Chen Shilling, Board Member with Dementia Singapore, said that arts-based programmes like this are increasingly being used to help persons with dementia with their wellbeing, engaging their minds and possibly slowing down a decline in their condition.

"Dance programmes in particular work well in lifting their moods, not to mention enhancing the mood of the caregiver participating in the programme. But it is the uniquely personal exchange between participants using the Totsu Totsu's approach, which utilises the principles of improvisation, that opens the door to possibly finding deeper connections," she said.

"It utilises elements of trust building exercises to help facilitate a more intimate channel of communication, verbal and non-verbal. With no wrong or right steps or set moves to memorise, it leaves participants open to discovering new ways to connect, and that is particularly beneficial when dealing with the uncertainties and anxieties persons with dementia may face."

Ms Serene Toh, 52, was one of the participants who was there with her husband, Mr Lee Kim Han, 55, who has Alzheimer's Disease.

"It was very interesting and an eye opener," said the full-time caregiver.

"I was really amazed to witness how fast Osamu Jareo and his team were able to connect with the persons living with dementia using Totsu-totsu dance technique and music, and



demonstrated connections with them through both physical and non-physical contact, and the effect it has on them.”

Mr Bernard Lim, Director of Advocacy and Communications for Dementia Singapore, said that Jareo had been in Singapore last month as well to conduct a workshop on Totsu-totsu for persons with dementia, caregivers, facilitators and potential collaborators here, noting that the session generated a lot of positive feedback from the participants.

“We noticed how non-verbal and even non-physical exercises, like when the dance only required participants to maintain eye contact, encouraged new lines of communication,” he said.

“We were also able to witness a marked improvement in the mood of some participants who were having an emotionally tough week.”

The Totsu-totsu dance session was just one of several activities taking place at Our Tampines Hub today to commemorate World Alzheimer’s Month, which falls in September.

Dementia Singapore also held its Family Fiesta Carnival at the Hub’s Town Square, which featured a giant inflatable playground, where families could soak in the fairground vibes while enjoying free snacks like ice cream, popcorn and candy floss.

The day will culminate with a fundraising concert featuring Danish band Michael Learns to Rock at the Hub. The concert, which was sold out, helped raise \$1.1 million in funds for Dementia Singapore for its activities to support the dementia community and its caregivers here.

Dementia Singapore also received a donation of \$80,000 from the Yongjing Family Office at the concert.

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About Dementia Singapore:

As Singapore’s leading Social Service Agency (SSA) in specialised dementia care, Dementia Singapore aims to advocate for the needs of people living with dementia and their families; empower the community through capability-building, knowledge and consultancy; and deliver quality, person-centred care innovations. Dementia Singapore is registered as a Company Limited by Guarantee, listed as a Charity and is recognised as an Institution of a Public Character (IPC). Dementia Singapore is a member of the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) and Alzheimer’s Disease International. We have been appointed by NCSS as a “Centre of Specialisation” since 2007, and are one of eight Learning Institutes under the Agency for Integrated Care Learning Network.

